

Letters to the Editor

GERALD OWEN REPLIES

Below we give the main paragraphs of a letter received from Cllr. Gerald Owen, with our comments in italics. Mr. Owen is prospective Liberal Parliamentary Candidate, Aldershot and N.E. Hants.

SIR,—I am not surprised that the resolution I moved at the Liberal Assembly provoked criticism in LAND & LIBERTY. The idea of "drawing a line across the calendar" found equal disfavour with followers of Henry George when John Stuart Mill proposed a similar measure. But had it been accepted then, the injustice of private profit being made from community-created land values would have been wiped out long ago.

There is no evidence whatsoever for assuming that, had the followers of Henry George accepted the "increment tax" long ago, it would have been adopted. The battle was never between an increment tax and land-value taxation, but between the private appropriation of land rent and the taxation of land values.

Although I am condemned as a heretic, the implementation of the proposals I put forward would ensure that the greater portion of future increases in site values were collected for the community. This is much more than a gradual introduction of site-value taxation alone would accomplish. And to maintain an "all or nothing" attitude by doggedly insisting upon the immediate imposition of a 100 per cent site-value tax will only ensure that nothing is done.

The suggestion that a tax to secure the "greater portion" of "future increases" in site values, levied only when land is sold, would yield more than a general tax on land values is plainly absurd.

This journal and those who subscribe to its views have never "doggedly" or otherwise insisted upon the immediate imposition of a 100 per cent. site-value tax.

The fact that land has been inextricably treated as any other kind of property for so long has caused a conflict of opinion among those who subscribe to the principle of site-value taxation as to how it should be introduced.

There is no conflict of opinion

among those who subscribe to the principle of site-value taxation. Mr. Owen's statement is self-contradictory.

The majority of electors have no knowledge of the theory of site-value taxation. To gain their support — and nothing can be accomplished without it — our proposals must be in terms they understand and can recognise as being aimed at the injustice of private profiteering from inflated land prices, which is causing such widespread concern.

A straightforward tax on land values is a more easily understood concept than the travesties of it which have caused so much confusion in the past. In any event we do not accept that the land problem is limited to "private profiteering from inflated land prices." High land prices are a symptom of the far deeper problem.

PRACTICAL POLITICS

SIR, — I trust that your readers will have studied with special attention the letters from Mr. Keith Ives and Mr. Ronald Banks which appeared in the November issue. Both are in sympathy with those libertarian ideas which we may here conveniently call Georgeism; both are committed to political action in the Liberal Party, the one as a prospective candidate for the new Greater London Council and the other as prospective candidate for election to Parliament.

Mr. Banks is despondent about the future and says that "although in the past the Liberal Party had an understanding of the importance of land in the economy, today no real understanding exists; a different kind of economic thought is dominant among leading Liberals."

In this I should say he is right, but Mr. Ives rightly asks us to give credit where credit is due, and in a more optimistic letter he pointed out the extent to which the Liberal Party is still a libertarian party and retains a strong current of traditional Liberal thinking on the taxation and rating of land values and on free trade.

As one who has been active in the Liberal Party since shortly after the end of the second world war, who has stood for Parliament as a Liberal, and who is now a prospective parlia-

mentary candidate, may I urge all Georgeists to go back to the August-September issue of LAND & LIBERTY and read again the article by Dr. Roy Douglas, himself a devoted Liberal and an indefatigable libertarian.

The Liberal Party is not dominated by that "different kind of economic thought" of which Mr. Banks writes because of any deliberate campaign treacherously to throw libertarianism overboard. Rather has it gone by default. Since the mid 'fifties, when the land values policy and free trade clearly commanded majority support in the Party, there has been a great revival in Liberal electoral fortunes, particularly at local government level, and many new people have become members of the Liberal Party. During this period — this vital period — there has been an exodus of persons of Georgist persuasion, mostly because of disagreement with the "official" line on the evanescent question of Britain's entry into the Common Market. Libertarians really must learn that the Liberal Party cannot be significantly influenced from the outside. How can all the new recruits be expected to understand the free economy, and the significance of what appears at first sight to be no more than a paltry reform of our rating system, if all the libertarians are closeted in some soundproof room far from the rowdiness of practical politics?

This is not to deny the excellent and invaluable work of the Henry George School, nor the splendid propaganda work of the Rating Reform Campaign. I do believe most strongly, however, that general educational work can go only so far, and that it may even be wasted to some extent if there is not also direct political action through the medium of a political party. The man who comes to grasp libertarian ideas must feel that more than a ten-week intellectual exercise is involved, and that he has the opportunity to do something about curing our sick collectivist society if he so wishes. There ought to be a flow from the classroom to the hustings.

Of course, I appreciate that not everyone has the temperament or the inclination for the political fray, and I also concede that some people may wish to work in a party other than the Liberal Party, though I should underline that Dr. Douglas gave forceful reasons for preferring the Liberals. It should not be difficult for a zealous libertarian to join his local Liberal Association, pitch in to all the hard work which has nothing whatsoever